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A-ONE #1718   05/08/15

~ Memories of LOVE BUG!   ~ People Are Talking!   ~ U.S. Suspects China!
~ Kano Gets Startup Money ~ What's Up With Konami? ~ $9 CHIP Computer!
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                    -* London Railway Passwords Out *-
                  -* Adware Is Pervasive Scam on Internet *-
                -* 1974 Mainframe Game First Text Adventure? *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Another long week, and another late issue! This is starting to be the
story of my life lately! Too much to do and not enough time to get it
all done! Sound familiar?

On the positive side, the weather has been absolutely beautiful this week!
The sun has been shining brightly, the temperatures have been warmer than
the seasonal average, and the flowers and trees are blooming like crazy.
I may even have to mow the lawn this weekend! What a sharp contrast to
the weather we were experiencing a month ago!

Well, so much for the New England weather report! Let's get right to
another week's issue before it's gets too late!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Steam Charging For Mods!
   """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Removing Payment Feature From Skyrim Workshop
!
                                   Mainframe Game From 1974 May Be First Text Ad
venture

                                   And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                  Steam Charging For Mods: For And Against

It used to be that the only way to make money from a mod was a) make a

standalone sequel or remake b) use it as a portfolio to get hired by a
studio or c) back in the pre-broadband days, shovel it onto a dodgy
CD-ROM (and even then, it almost certainly wasn t the devs who
profited). As of last night, that changed. Mod-makers can now charge for
their work, via Steam.

It s far too soon to know the long-term outcome of Valve offering the
option for mod creators to charge for their work, which went live
yesterday using Skyrim as a test case. Everyone has an opinion, and I ll
try to cover the main angles below, but first I simply want to express
simple sadness. Not fatalistic sadness   I m genuinely curious as to how
this will play out, and there s high potential for excitement   but End
Of An Era sadness.

Mods, free, fan-made modifications or extra content for existing games,
have been a part of PC gaming for almost as long as there has been PC
gaming. To think that this is changing, in that there may be less
availability of free mods, and in that mod teams may now embark on their
projects with a mind to earning a living from it rather than purely
enthusiasm, is bittersweet. I do want people to be compensated for their
work, and I do want people to be able to lay hands on more resources to
make their endeavours   so often wilder than anything which would arise
from an established studio   better still, as well as potentially
receiving more co-operation from the original games developers. I don t
resist this change, but I am misty-eyed for the potential loss of what
was. It was always delightful to gaze at all this weird, wonderful,
usually broken fare, created from pure love and determination. Mods gave
new, extended life and flair to games including Half-Life, Doom and
Skyrim, mods lead to DayZ and Team Fortress, mods are as PC gaming as PC
gaming gets. I salute them.

In all honesty, it s highly unlike that free mods will go away, not least
because it can be hard to make players blindly stump up for unknown
quantities, but change is upon us. The gulf between hobbyist and
professional is shrinking, and while that means more potential for
projects to go off the rails, it also means more potential for new ideas
and new voices to reach an audience. In all honesty, I don t not
strongly for or against this move, so don t expect a tubthumping THIS IS
WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN conclusion. I do want to look at some of the major
arguments for and against this new age of paid mods, however.

FOR

Most of all, this is a motivation for people to make this stuff, to make
it better, and to be compensated for it. Potentially, it also creates yet
more routes into game development that don t involved signing your life
away to a big studio or publisher. Additionally, it removes even more
barriers from making money from truly out-there stuff: without the same
degree of risk as making a game from scratch, this can be the true test
of If You Build It, They Will Come.

Someone with a wild idea, someone from a minority background or with an
outsider perspective, no longer need necessarily make an entire game,
and all the time and financial risk that entails, to put something out
in the world. Don t focus on uncomfortable ideas of someone becoming a
millionaire from digital hat sales: creators being better able to afford
to do something adventurous or elaborate is enormously meaningful here.

We can also look at this as long-overdue tribute to an ethos which has
made PC gaming the vibrant, impossibly wide-ranging scene we have today.

Without mods we wouldn t have Team Fortress or Dota 2, DayZ or Return To Castle Wolfenstein, Heroes of the Storm or Natural Selection, Counter-Strike or Killing Floor, Dear Esther or League of Legends, Antichamber or Garry s Mod, Red Orchestra or Stanley Parable. And that s just the commercial stuff factor in wonderful work which never went standalone or paid, such as Civ IV: Fall From Heaven, Action Half-Life, XCOM: The Long War, Action Quake 2, Complex for Homeworld 2, Game of Thrones for Crusader Kings 2, The Third Age for Medieval 2, Just Cause 2 multiplayer, the endless community patches for Vampire: The Masquerade Bloodlines There are so many others, and we should celebrate them below, but in any case it only feels right to now be rewarding that scene, to encourage it to new heights.

Potentially, money means more updates, better support, more scope and scale, more longevity, more potential for mod teams to move onto bigger and better things. Something as simple as being able to hire an artist, writer or actor can make all the difference between so-so and fantastic, for instance. All that said, there are a great many mods which have been updated and improved for years based on nothing but dedication and goodwill. I don t think it s at all true to say there is a need to move to a payment model, but it may open more doors for more people.

It s worth noting as we talk about money that, in the case of Skyrim, mod-makers will receive just a 25% revenue share of whatever they sell their creation for, so apart from in rare cases this is unlikely to be a path to riches. While there s certainly an argument to be made that the teams who make this stuff are getting a raw deal out of this new scheme, at least hopefully it will prevent people getting into mods purely with money on their mind. The option to be free remains, naturally, plus Valve have added a particularly intriguing Pay What You Want system (which I have little doubt will later be expanded to full games, as an attempt to take on Humble), so we re not at all looking at a paywall being erected around mod-town.

The 25% sum is proving contentious, inevitably. I don t have a dog in this race myself, but what I do hope is that, whatever the norm ends up being, it leads to more publishers being more open about their games being modded. Many big games are effectively locked down, either because the work to include any sort of mod tools wasn t considered worthwhile or in the recent example of GTA V concerns that the integrity of the intended experience would be undermined. (Another way of putting that is money-men worrying that some amateurish mod makes their company s project look bad, or that a more popular mode would pull players out of an intended walled garden). I wouldn t be at all surprised if some individual developers were simply sniffily resistant to others changing their work. If putting money on the table means more games can have more mod support, for that reason alone I m in comfortable with this move.

Related to this is other rights-holders permitting rather than cracking down on mods. What if all those copyright-ignoring boardgame adaptations released for Tabletop Simulator would be legalised, either by giving a cut to Fantasy Flight or whoever, or simply tempting Fantasy Flight or whoever (including indie boardgame designers) to release their own adaptations for it? What if SyFy or Lucasarts officially OKed the Battlestar and Star Wars mods that so many people cry out for, even if it came down to them taking every penny of profit? There s a great deal of potential, but it s potential both to crack open the hitherto unyielding shell of copyright and to outright fleece well-intentioned fans.

Which brings us onto some of the reasons this mightn t be such a happy turn of events.

AGAINST

There are potentially huge downsides to paid mods, many of which relate to Steam itself. Valve has a propensity to hurl its new schemes into the lion s den that is its own community and see what happens, not always taking an active hand in managing things which millions of people look at. Though they just about fall more into helping than hindering, Greenlight and Steam Curators still seem like cobbled-together half-solutions to discoverability problems, Steam Tags and the Workshop are rife with stuff which sails close to the wind, and generally there s this sense of ramshackle lawlessness.

The mod scene is lawless enough as it is already, be it ripping off other creators, borrowing liberally from other IP or falling apart due to in-fighting: adding money, and a direct pipe onto the firehose that is Steam, into the equation is a fearsome prospect. On the other hand, item sales for Dota and Steam Workshop have successfully become their own economy, and been very profitable for some creators. With a careful hand, easy access and plenty of support, this is do-able: we just have to hope that Valve has gone into it with a determination to make it work rather than a Que Sera Sera mindset.

There s also this concern that Valve are bringing yet more of PC gaming under their already monopolistic roof. Mods have long been their own weird, ungoverned splinter cell, but moving to a paid model (though again, this is completely optional, plus there s no guarantee that many mods will move away from their own homes or Moddb and into Steam s arm) means that the PC games ecosystem is all the more defined by Steam. It s been happening for a little while already, of course- the Workshop for Skyrim stole Nexusmods thunder, while dramatic tweaking of Cities: Skylines doesn t ever require leaving Steam s interface. This potential to make a mod lucrative as well as popular may well seal the deal that Steam is now the place to be. Other sites and providers may suffer, and many projects fate will be at the whim of Steam s discoverability tools.

Another contentious issue about this move is, as mentioned in the For column, how much share the original game s rights-holders will take of a mod s sales. Valve confirm that this is going to vary on a case by case basis, so let s not get ahead of ourselves here, but for Skyrim mod-makers get 25%, with the remaining 75% being split between Valve and Skyrim publisher Bethesda. 75% is a lot. Too soon to say if this is a precedent, but I doubt big publishers will want to take less if they don t have to. Some feel this is too much to the IP owners and platform holder, given the work was done by the modders and that in some cases mods sell games rather than vice-versa, while others feel it s only fair given that the mods wouldn t exist were it not for the game, as well as pointing out that, by other industries standards, those are generous licensing terms.

One more question mark hanging over this concept is whether players will be willing to pay in the first place. The mercenary froth of DLC and in-app purchases lying atop latter-day mainstream gaming suggests yes, but in this case we re talking about far more unknown quantities. A mod isn t coming from an official source (though isn t the idea of developers making new stuff for each other s games very appealing?), therefore there s no guarantee of quality, on either an artistic or technical level. Steam s trying to counter that right out the gates to some degree

by offering a 24 hour window for refunds if a mod is broken or doesn t
work as promised , but even so, some may feel they re essentially
gambling their money. 24 hours won t cover a promised update never
happening, brokenness won t cover a mod being unspeakably awful   and
there s far more scope for an amateur project to be unspeakable awful
than there is for a professionally-made game (in theory).

This is not to mention that essentially paygating a mod will, initially a
least, limit the size of its audience. Would the original DOTA or
Counter-Strike have become as huge as they did if they weren t free for
anyone to suck it and see, with more players coming in as word of mouth
spread far and wide? Is this really a new age of ambitious total
conversions, or an end to it in favour of nickel n diming minor add-ons?

There also tall hurdles to leapt in terms of the mod scene s propensity
to cannibalise itself or borrow assets without permission, for the Steam
userbase s broad expectation that developers will provide technical
support and communication, for what happens if a work-in-progress mod
grinds to an unfinished halt because someone lost interest or there
wasn t enough money, for how on Earth to sort out ex-team members
resurfacing and demanding a cut of a free mod that s now paid.

Fortunately, we are already seeing early signs of Valve s plans for
community-led policing of problems as they arise   a paid Skyrim mod which
used content from someone else s work has today been pulled. It s too soon
to know if such rapid respond will be the norm, especially given how
difficult it can be to ascertain what is and isn t original out in
modland, but at least it s not a hey, whatever shrug right off the bat.

As I say, I don t incline strongly one way or another, but I am fascinated
to see how it works out, as one of the touchstones of PC games moves into
a new era. Maybe the uncertainty and contention around it is entirely in
keeping with the PC long being gaming s wild west, forever heading to new
frontiers while other platforms settle down. Potentially, this is a huge
and disruptive change, and things may go horribly wrong, but change is
what makes PC gaming PC gaming. Let s see what happens.

Removing Payment Feature From Skyrim Workshop

We're going to remove the payment feature from the Skyrim workshop. For
anyone who spent money on a mod, we'll be refunding you the complete
amount. We talked to the team at Bethesda and they agree.

We've done this because it's clear we didn't understand exactly what we
were doing. We've been shipping many features over the years aimed at
allowing community creators to receive a share of the rewards, and in the
past, they've been received well. It's obvious now that this case is
different.

To help you understand why we thought this was a good idea, our main
goals were to allow mod makers the opportunity to work on their mods full
time if they wanted to, and to encourage developers to provide better
support to their mod communities. We thought this would result in better
mods for everyone, both free & paid. We wanted more great mods becoming
great products, like Dota, Counter-strike, DayZ, and Killing Floor, and
we wanted that to happen organically for any mod maker who wanted to
take a shot at it.

But we underestimated the differences between our previously successful revenue sharing models, and the addition of paid mods to Skyrim's workshop. We understand our own game's communities pretty well, but stepping into an established, years old modding community in Skyrim was probably not the right place to start iterating. We think this made us miss the mark pretty badly, even though we believe there's a useful feature somewhere here.

Now that you've backed a dump truck of feedback onto our inboxes, we'll be chewing through that, but if you have any further thoughts let us know.

What Is Going on With the Business of Konami?

Konami stocks will no longer trade on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. The company still maintains a presence in both the London and Tokyo Stock Exchanges, but as of last Friday, April 24, it voluntarily delisted itself from the NYSE.

The low volume of Konami stocks traded on the NYSE is why Konami believes "the continued listing on the NYSE is not economically justified."

Voluntary delisting can be a part of an internal restructuring, and anyone who has been following Konami in the slightest knows there have been quite a few shakeups within the company. In March, Konami rebranded Kojima Productions to Konami Digital Productions. This spurred rumors that Hideo Kojima would leave Konami after the release of Metal Gear Solid V.

Certain financial requirements must be met by a company for it to be listed on the NYSE. Failing to meet these requirements would result in a non-voluntary delisting of a stock from the exchange.

Rumors began to swirl on Sunday that the upcoming Kojima and Guillermo del Toro Silent Hills game was being cancelled. First it was revealed that P.T., the Silent Hill teaser, was being pulled from the PlayStation Store. Then a comment made by del Toro during a panel at the San Francisco Film Festival confirmed that the director would no longer be collaborating with Kojima on Silent Hills. This was all followed by confirmation from Konami Monday morning that Silent Hills was, in fact, no more.

The delisting news comes at a time when outward appearances make it seem as though Konami is shifting its focus away from game development. In its financial report for the third quarter of 2015, digital entertainment saw a contraction of just over 5%, while its slot machine division saw a moderate 4.2% gain year over year. The brightest growth area for the company was in fact its pachinko division. Pachinko, a type of Japanese gambling machine, saw nearly 100% growth from the same period the year earlier.

The voluntary delisting of Konami shows that the trouble of maintaining a US stock exchange presence no longer makes financial sense, and the company says as much in the delisting notice that it issued on Friday. With the growth of its gambling sector shining brightly compared to its gaming section, corporate restructuring and the will-they, won't-they nature of Konami's relationship with Kojima, only time will tell what

this all means for the future of Konami games.

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A Rediscovered Mainframe Game From 1974 Might Be The First Text Adventure

In the 60s and 70s, IBM produced mainframe computers the room-filling
monstrosities we chortle at today. Housed in universities, hospitals, and
businesses, these computers were also the source of many of the earliest
videogames, which today we call mainframe games. Many of them have been
lost to history, but we may be seeing something of a comeback for them.
Just last month, AMC released its recreation of 1976 text-based cave
exploration adventure game Colossal Cave Adventure complete with newly
designed pictures in preparation for the second season of their 1980s
computer period drama Halt and Catch Fire.

And now, Wander, a 1974 mainframe game that had disappeared over the
course of decades, has wandered its way back into the hands of the
public. It predates Colossal Cave Adventure and is often considered one
of the first text-based adventure games. Ant of Retroactive Fiction, a
website devoted to restoring interest in older 1970s and 80s games,
contacted Wander creator Peter Langston after seeing the game on a list
of lost mainframe games. Langston responded with files and multiple
versions of the game that he found in an archived email his friend had
saved of it. It s now up on GitHub for those who want to trek through
castles, explore the ruins of a library and take a trip through
space that is, if you know how to install the code on your computer.

The reason why some of these mainframe games disappeared from existence
primarily had to do with the hardware. Mainframe computers were
expensive, extensive and massive computing systems usually owned by large
corporations or educational facilities, like University of Illinois's
 60s e-learning system PLATO (the first of its kind). Apparently, even
though NASA powered down their last one in 2012 to fully switch to
supercomputers, they re still one of IBM s most lucrative products, with
the latest, cheapest model currently priced at $75,000. (They can reach
upwards of one million dollars). The cost and size of the mainframe was
what aided in the disappearance of many old games: Writing code for games
on these computers was usually done so illicitly, which meant games were
not shared as frequently. It seems Wander had a larger distribution,
according Jason Dyer and Ant, but still managed to disappear from the
radar.

With Langston redistributing his game to the masses, we may hopefully see
more 60s and 70s mainframe games cropping up. While newer text-based
games are being created on the regular I used to play Homestar Runner s
Dungeon Man religiously, and Twine games have become a form unto
themselves it s cool to see the older code being rediscovered and
redistributed. Hopefully, one day, we ll have more user-friendly
variations of them to feed every piqued curiosity.

U.S. Concerned China Behind Cyberattack on U.S. Sites

The United States voiced concern Friday over a report that China manipulated international Internet traffic intended for a major Chinese Web service company and used it for a cyberattack on U.S. sites.

State Department spokesman Jeff Rathke's comments follow complaints from anti-online censorship group Greatfire.org that Chinese authorities carried out denial-of-service attacks in late March that intermittently shut down San Francisco-based Github, a U.S.-based computer-code sharing site that hosts some of Greatfire's data. Greatfire.org said it was a direct target of similar attacks earlier that month.

Greatfire.org, which has received U.S. government funding, produces mirror websites that let Chinese users see information normally blocked by government censors.

Citizen Lab, a research unit based at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, attributed the attack to an offensive system it dubbed the "Great Cannon" that manipulates the traffic of systems outside China, silently programming their browsers to create a massive denial of service attack.

"We are concerned by reports that China has used a new cyber capability to interfere with the ability of worldwide Internet users to access content hosted outside of China," Rathke told reporters. He said the U.S. has asked Chinese authorities to investigate and provide the findings.

"We view attacks by malicious cyberactors, who target critical infrastructure, U.S. companies and U.S. consumers, as threats to national security and to the economy of the United States," Rathke said.

In its own report, Greatfire.org alleged that Chinese authorities carried out the attacks by installing malicious code on the computers of users visiting the popular Chinese search engine Baidu and related sites and used those computers to overwhelm Github and Greatfire.org websites with service requests.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

When Greatfire.org initially reported the denial of service attack in mid-March, embassy spokesman Zhu Haiquan, described as "unfounded accusation" any suggestion of Chinese government involvement. He said China was making great efforts to combat cybercrimes and safeguard cybersecurity.

China's government blocks thousands of websites to prevent what it deems politically sensitive information from reaching Chinese users. That is known as the "Great Firewall."

Greatfire.org doesn't reveal where it's located or who runs it. The Open Technology Fund, a U.S. government-backed initiative to support Internet freedom, says on its website that it provided Greatfire.org with $114,000 in 2014.

Google Research Reveals How Pervasive Adware Is on Your Computer

Adware continues to be one of the most pervasive scams on the Internet, according to Google, which found more than five million computers infected with the malware.

The scam works by infecting a computer and then serving advertisements on new websites in an additional window that can more often than not be a pain to close. Scammers are able to exploit the scheme by collecting revenue for any ads that have been served.

Working with the University of California, Berkeley and Santa Barbara, Google looked at computers visiting the search engine from June to October 2014 to see if adware was being locally injected.

What they found were approximately 5.5 percent of the unique users accessed Google sites that included some version of the advertising malware.

"We pursued this research to raise awareness about the ad injection economy so that the broader ads ecosystem can better understand this complex issue and work together to tackle it," a Google post said.

Google said eradicating adware is important because it not only undermines the integrity of online advertising but it can also put users' computers at risk of a "man in the middle" attack and hijack their personal information.

London Railway System Passwords Exposed During TV Documentary

One of London's busiest railway stations has unwittingly exposed their system credentials during a BBC documentary. The sensitive credentials printed and attached to the top of a station controller's monitor were aired on Wednesday night on BBC.

If you think that the credentials might have been shown off in the documentary for a while or some seconds, then you are still unaware of the limit of their stupidity.

The login credentials were visible for about 44 minute in the BBC documentary "Nick and Margaret: The Trouble with Our Trains" on Wednesday night, which featured Nick Hewer and Margaret Mountford the two business experts, both famous for their supporting role on The Apprentice.

The documentary was available on the YouTube, but have now been removed due to security concerns.

While talking about the concerns of the British railway network, the duo walked into London Waterloo's control room where these sensitive credentials were seen stuck to a monitor of a system.

A screenshot of the offending monitor with the machine-produced login was captured and shown. The screenshot points to a particular workstation signaller's control desk seems to be running a type of software that controls signals and trains over the final approach to Waterloo station.

Now this is going to be a great idea to keep passwords. Isn t this? I mean if it is, then what s the need of putting passwords for the devices if you stuck it on the top of that device.

This shows that we are just humans. Remembering so many personal passwords of our different online accounts and then to remember the passwords of others   Ahh! Quite a tough Job.

Okay, now let s come to another security concern. What would you expect next?

I mean, at least keep a strong password that take some time to guess and crack. Password3 could be in the list of top ten weakest passwords.

The incident occur few days after the news came that the computer systems controlling the railway signalling system in the United Kingdom could potentially be hacked by cyber criminals to cause oncoming trains to crash into one another at highest speeds.

However, this security blunder of revealing passwords mistakenly in an interview, video or news channel is not new at all.

Last year, the World Cup security centre s internal Wi-Fi passwords for the FIFA World Cup 2014 were broadcast live. Also, French TV network TV5Monde failed to keep its passwords secret and revealed a collection of the TV station s usernames and passwords live on TV.

Memories of The LOVE BUG - 15 Years Ago

Today is the fifteenth anniversary of the infamous LOVE BUG virus.

It just about conquered the world's email servers back in May 2000 because each infected computer would email everybody in its address book.

Actually, it didn't just email every body, it emailed every address book entry, including mail groups with multiple members.

The silver lining in the LOVE BUG malware attack is that it became really obvious really soon, being the very antithesis of subtle.

But the bad news is that by the time it was obvious, the world's email infrastructure had already suffered huge collateral damage, and the malware was everywhere.

The author, Onel de Guzman from the Philippines, was quickly identified

and questioned by law enforcement.

But even though the LOVE BUG not only created damage by spreading, but also tried to download and install a password stealing program, de Guzman evaded prosecution.

What he'd done wasn't strictly illegal at the time (unless prosecutors had been able to show intent to break other, non-malware-related laws).

The Philippines legislature quickly moved to change that, presumably fearing that without more teeth in the legal code, malware disseminators could continue to shrug their shoulders and get off.

So de Guzman may have brought about a tightening of cybercrime regulations in The Philippines, but he himself slipped the knot and got off scot free.

If you weren't around at the time, LOVE BUG looked like this:

Subject line: ILOVEYOU
Body text: kindly check the attached LOVELETTER coming from me
Attachment: LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU.TXT

Many people opened the attachment out of innocent curiosity, presumably assuming that a .TXT file ought to be harmless, even if it later turned out to come from a crook.

But the filename was actually LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU.TXT.vbs, abusing what's now known as the "double extension" trick.

Many operating systems, including Windows and OS X, helpfully suppress the characters after the last dot in a filename, figuring that they just take up space on the screen to convey information that is already obvious in other ways, such as the icon assigned to the file, or the application suggested to open it.

On Windows, if removing the real extension leaves what looks like another extension, the fake extension does get shown, giving you a false sense of safety.

So, LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU looked like a plain old text file, but was actually Visual Basic Script (VBS) program.

In those days, opening the file from Outlook would run the program instead of displaying it, and if your anti-virus didn't kick in to protect you, the damage was done.

Modern cybercrooks still use this sort of trick, "hiding" the fact that attachments are really EXEs (programs) or various other sorts of file of which we have learned to be suspicious.

And cybercrooks still rely on the simple but effective trick of choosing plausible or intriguing attachments.

They don't go for love letters so much any more, for which we probably have to thank Onel de Guzman in a backhand sort of way, but they get great mileage from files such as:

  Fake invoices. (You'd better look or else you may get stuck with a bill you don't owe.)
  Bogus courier deliveries. (You'd better reply or you might miss a

delivery.)

News items in your field of interest. (Crooks can often work out what makes you tick simply from your job title or your Facebook page.)

Don't fall for the modern equivalent of the bogus love letter.

Block suspicious attachment types (e.g. double extensions) at your mail gateway, just in case.
Don't open attachments out of fear or because you're inquisitive.
Scan outbound emails as well as incoming, to look for information that shouldn't be leaving.
Always show file extensions, because you can.

Outbound scanning for LOVE BUG back in 2000 could have helped you contain the virus so it didn't keep blasting itself out from your network and thereby advertising your security troubles.

In 2015, outbound email scanning can protect you from much worse, such as: spam sent by zombies or bots in your network (which might be stealing passwords and data as well); accidental data leakages through incorrectly chosen email recipients; and even deliberate attempts to bypass your security rules to embarrass your organisation.

Fifteen years ago, there was so much ILOVEYOU going around that to be publicly identified as one of the many victims wouldn't have made you stand out, and would probably have ended up as an easily-forgiven mistake.

Today, data breaches and infected networks aren't so readily excused, not least because of regulatory changes that are leaning on all of us to take security and privacy ever more seriously.

DIY Computer Startup Gets $15 Million

Dude, you re getting a   Kano.

That s right. Your kid s first computer might be one she builds herself. For $149, kids (or adults) can build a computer and learn basic coding skills to program it.

 Kano is a new type of PC, said co-founder Alex Klein at TechCrunch Disrupt on Monday. One that is creative, low-cost, physical, fun. We think that can be mainstream, mass market.

It appears investors agree. Klein announced $15 million in funding, in a Series A round led by Breyer Capital Collaborative Fund and other investors, including British economist Jim O Neill.

Kano previously raised $1.5 million on Kickstarter in December 2013, surpassing its $100,000 campaign goal   which it hit in just 16 hours.

The colorful Kano kit must be assembled (pieces are manufactured in China). It contains twelve components, including: Raspberry Pi board (the brains of the computer), build-your-own speaker, wireless orange keyboard, transparent case, WiFi connector and two illustration books (kid-friendly manuals that read like stories). You ll need your own monitor, as it s not included.

The recent funding will go toward Kano s new computer kit, which features an upgraded Raspberry Pi 2. This will make the computers six times faster. The new kit also includes additional updates, like new code blocks and challenges.

For the 40,000 people in 86 countries who already possess the Kano, there s a also Powerup Kit, which lets users repurpose the Pi 1 into the Pi 2.

Even as it enters the big leagues, Kano isn t forgetting its crowdfunding past.

Kano also launched a campaign on equity crowdfunding platform Quire to raise $500,000 that will go toward the round. That way, the community can get more than just a computer kit   they can take equity in the firm.

 We feel the more participatory this company is, the more accessible the final product will be, Klein said, noting that they ll leverage the platform to solicit feedback and ideas, much as they did with Kickstarter.

Though the average age of a Kano user is 9.5 years old, Klein said there s no one-size-fits-all when it comes to customers: 45-year-old veterans of Operation Desert Storm, 81-year-old grandmothers   artists, painters. It s beautiful.

Klein said they want to democratize the ability to make technology, not just consume it, he said.

That s the reason Kano s products ship for free   so there s no impediment for users in certain parts of the world.

 We re trying to put that creative, experimental, improvisational power back into the hands of the people, Klein said.

The Next Thing Unveils $9 Computer, CHIP

CHIP is a $9 computer that comes with a 1GHz processor, 512 MB or RAM and 4 GB of storage. But any accessories to make it suitable for work, like a screen or keyboard, cost extra.

People may soon be able to buy a computer with a $20 bill and still have change left over for a cup or two of coffee.

An Oakland, Calif.-based company has unveiled its $9 CHIP computer on Kickstarter.

CHIP, which is about as tall as a AA-battery and smaller than a floppy disk, packs some power with a 1 GHz processor, 512 MB of RAM and 4 GB of storage. The device connects to any screen using a composite, VGA or HDMI cable.

Users can save documents to the computer's storage, surf the web over Wi-Fi or play games with a bluetooth controller. The little computer comes pre-loaded with games and apps, as well as Scratch, a language that teaches the basics of programming.

The company says the computer is intended with everyone in mind. It's "a computer for students, teachers, grandparents, children, artists, makers, hackers and inventors," the company says. They built the device "to make tiny powerful computers more accessible and easier to use."

Despite its low cost, consumers will have to pay extra for everything they need to do the work they want on CHIP: a screen and a cord to connect the two, a keyboard and mouse, or a bluetooth controller.

For $49, the company offers CHIP with a device to make the computer portable. PocketCHIP houses CHIP in a device that looks like a smartphone and has a nearly 11 centimetre touchscreen, keyboard and battery that lasts up to five hours.

Next Thing Co. launched the project on Kickstarter Thursday. The only way the company can produce such an inexpensive computer is by purchasing components in large quantities, an employee says in a video posted on the crowdfunding page.

By Friday afternoon the company had well surpassed its original $50,000 US goal. Nearly 5,00 backers had pledged more than $220,000 total for the little computer, the PocketCHIP package or another product bundle.

The company projects they'll start fulfilling orders between September this year and May 2016, depending on what people ordered.

Anyone who pledges $150 will receive an early model of CHIP in September before receiving their actual device later on. People who back the project for $9, ordering only the CHIP, will receive their order in Dec.

Microsoft's Big Windows 10 Goal: One Billion Or Bust

For Windows 10, Microsoft is aiming for a 10-digit installed base.

That's a 1 followed by 9 zeroes: 1,000,000,000. One billion devices running Windows 10.

At the Build developers' conference in San Francisco earlier this month, Microsoft's Terry Myerson declared that the company's goal was to reach the billion-device milestone "within two to three years after launch."

Now a billion might not be what it used to be, but it's still a big number. How realistic is it?

If you do the math, it's not hard to get to that number and even beyond.

That math is, unfortunately, fuzzy, because we don't really know how many PCs and tablets and phones are out there to a fine level of precision, nor what the owners of those devices have done with them since they were purchased.

But there are enough reliable sales figures out there, some in official reports from companies, others supplied by trustworthy market research firms, to make some educated guesses. Even with wide-ranging assumptions and allowing very broad margins of error, there are plausible paths to a billion.

With those caveats, let's survey the Windows 10 landscape as it might look in 2018.

Every quarter, Gartner and IDC report their estimates of worldwide PC sales for the previous three months. They also publish projections of that the market will look like a few years into the future.

The most recent numbers show steady declines in sales of traditional desktop and laptop PCs, with steady growth in the (currently much smaller) segment of what Gartner calls "premium ultramobiles" like Apple's latest MacBook and Microsoft's Surface Pro series.

Consensus estimates of Windows PC and tablet sales for the next few years are flat, at roughly 300 million annually.

Not all them will be running Windows 10, of course. Microsoft has yet to announce an end to sales of Windows 7 PCs, and there are plenty of enterprises that will exercise downgrade rights to maintain their Windows 7 deployments.

Even if only half of those 300 million new PCs each year are running Windows 10, that's nearly half a billion after three years. Given Microsoft's willingness to deal on the cost of Windows 10 and its ability to end sales of Windows 7 PCs, the actual percentage of new devices running the new OS will probably be much higher.

Microsoft First To Support 'Middle Finger' Emoji

Microsoft has dared to go where Apple and Google have so far feared to tread, becoming the first big consumer OS vendor to add the "middle finger" emoji to its software platform.

Flipping the bird in emoji form has been around since the middle of last year, rolled out as part of the Unicode 7 update. But "Reversed Hand With Middle Finger Extended Emoji" wasn't supported in Windows 8 or 8.1. The emoji, which also goes by the names "Middle Finger," "Rude Finger," and "Flipping The Bird," will be available in Windows 10, according to Emojipedia.

The middle finger symbol still isn't supported by Apple's iOS and Mac OS platforms or Google's Android and Chrome software. So Microsoft will be first out of the gate with this one, though Redmond has been slower than some to get on the emoji bandwagon in recent years.

Emojipedia has a nice chronology of emoji availability in Windows, detailing how Windows 8 was the first Microsoft OS to support the popular textual symbols, but only in black-and-white versions. It wasn't until Windows 8.1 that Redmond got around to supporting color emoji.

With Windows 10, Microsoft is looking to take the lead in some emoji-related areas. Per Emojipedia, the next-gen OS will set the default skin tone of emoji people to a race-neutral gray, breaking from the bright yellow skin tone used by Apple and Google. Emoji people in Windows 8.1 have a default skin tone of light pink, making them white folks, essentially.

You can adjust the skin tones of many of the available emoji people in

Windows 10. Emojipedia said there are five skin tone options in addition
to neutral gray pale, cream white, moderate brown, dark brown, and black.

Microsoft has also tinkered with some of the emoji in its stable for
Windows 10, for example adding an emoji woman's face to its Haircut Emoji
and making some changes large and small to an assortment of emoji faces.
Meanwhile the Information Desk Person goes from a blocky silhouette in
Windows 8.1 to a winking, animated woman much like the same emoji in
iOS and Mac OS.

           Intel Asks The World To Be More Secure on 'Password Day'

First, there s Star Wars Day, then we ve got Cinco de Mayo, and now if
Intel gets its way, the first week of May could have it s next big
holiday   Password Day!

The effort is being launched as part of a partnership between Intel
Security, Microsoft, Asus, and the Cybersecurity Alliance. As more
database hacks reveal that one of the most common passwords in use today
is password123, these companies are beginning to realize that if we
want to get serious about credential security   it s time to break out
the hash-tags.

Intel is relying on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to get
the word out, with a number of share buttons attached to every tip and
tile on the front page. By retweeting under #PasswordConfession,
thousands of users are sharing their most embarrassing password
stories. Some are humiliating, while others are just downright sad, but
all are entertaining glimpses into the kinds of passwords people use in
the real world.

You can even test the strength of your own password using a tool
provided by Microsoft on the main site. However, somewhat ironically it
seems the home page hasn t been totally secured itself, with warnings
popping up for users that Intel s portal isn t configured with
 up-to-date security settings under the HTTPS protocol. This probably
means its security certification is out of date, or not properly
registered.

While it s definitely good practice to get into the habit of changing
your passwords at least once a year, at the bare minimum you should
probably do it on a site that has all its security certificates in
order first.

                              =~=~=~=

request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org